

TRANSPARENCY AND OPACITY: RECTO-VERSO WORKS BY PAUL KLEE

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SUMMARY

Paul Klee hat beim Malen und Zeichnen häufig beide Seiten des Bildträgers verwendet. Bis heute konnten in Klees rund 9,600 Arbeiten umfassenden Œuvre, etwa 570 solcher beidseitig bearbeiteten Bilder identifiziert werden. In der Klee-Forschung sind diese beidseitig bearbeiteten Bilder trotz ihrer bemerkenswerten Quantität weder vollständig erfasst noch systematisch analysiert worden. Im Artikel wird der Versuch unternommen, Klees dynamische Kunsttheorie, das Kunst-

werk nicht vom statischen Gesichtspunkt des Vollendeten aus, sondern vielmehr als organisch-dynamischer Werkprozess zu verstehen, kunsthistorisch nachzuweisen. In der systematischen Analyse der Vorder- und Rückseite der beidseitig bearbeiteten Bilder und deren Bezogenheit aufeinander soll der vom Künstler proklamierte Begriff des «dynamischen Schaffensprozesses», des Primats des »Werdens über dem Sein«, kenntlich gemacht werden.

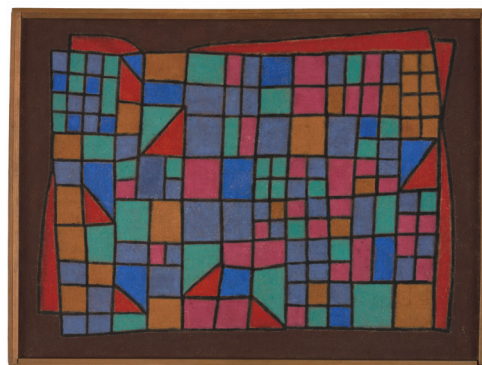
INTRODUCTION

Paul Klee often used both sides of the support, such as a sheet of paper, cardboard or canvas, for painting and drawing. To date, in Klee's oeuvre, comprising some 9,600 works, around 570 such double-sided works have been identified. Their creation extends over the entire creative period of the artist. Despite their remarkable quantity, the phenomenon of Klee's recto-verso works has been neither fully documented nor systematically analyzed.

as part of an organic-dynamic work process.¹ In a systematic analysis of the recto and verso of the double-sided works and their relationship to one another, the artist's proclaimed concept of the »dynamic creative process«, the primacy of »becoming above being«², will be elucidated.

Ninety percent of all double-sided works are on »monochrome and multicolored sheets«. The few cases where recto-verso works have been investigated in Klee research, however, were nearly all double-sided panel paintings. Jürgen Glaesemer first drew attention to the phenomenon of double-sided works in 1973. In the collection catalogue of the Kunstmuseum Bern he pointed out that sketches are often found on the reverse of the preliminary drawing for oil pauses.³ However, Glasemer's discovery was not followed up by additional research. It was not until the 1990s that individual double-sided panel paintings were examined by means of a technically more precise analysis. In 1990, Wolfgang Kersten and Anne Trembley presented the first art-historically and art-technologically based study of the painting *Glass Façade*, [*Glas-Fassade*, 1940, 288] (FIG. 1) in their contribution *Malerei als Provokation der Materie*.

Fig. 1
Paul Klee
Glass Façade, 1940, 288
wax paint on burlap on canvas
71,3 x 95,7 cm
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Bildarchiv



In this article, an attempt is made to demonstrate from an art historical point of view Klee's dynamic art theory, i.e. that the object of the creative process is not to reach a static condition where the work is consummated, but rather that the artwork is always in flux

They could establish a connection between the front and the back of the painting with regard to the process of decay.⁴

In 2015, Osamu Okuda revisited the findings on *Glass Façade* in the online journal of the Zentrum Paul Klee *Zwitscher-Maschine*.⁵ Okuda finds that the recto of *Glass Façade*, which may recall the curtain wall of the Dessau Bauhaus building, forms a counterpart to the overpainted depiction of a girl on the back who died in an »accident« (cf. *Unfall*, 1939, 1178) (FIG.2) and turned into an angel figure (FIG.3). In correspondence with the difficult to read title of the overpainted verso picture on top of the stretcher frame: »Girl dies and becomes.« The overpainted girl is only slowly becoming visible again through the peeling off of the color pigments, a successive process of decay that the artist must have consciously intended.

Abb. 2
Paul Klee
Accident, 1939, 1178
coloured paste and oil on paper on cardboard
68 x 39,5 cm
Private collection, Switzerland
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv



Abb. 3
Paul Klee
Untitled (verso image of *Glass Façade*)
oil on primed canvas
rotated 90 degrees
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Bildarchiv



Klee's work is characterized by an experimental use of a wide variety of materials, which were hardly used in painting before him. The resulting familiarity enabled him to construct his paintings and colored sheets in a complex manner by combining different grounds and/or supports (gauze, plaster, paper, canvas, jute and more) and by superimposing several layers of paint (pencil, ink, chalk, gouache, watercolor, oil paint, paste paint, wax paint). By the knowledgeable combination of these materials and their relative durability Klee incorporated the decay process into his artistic creative process, thus realizing the primacy of the work of art as forever becoming.⁶

As early as 1995, Kersten and Okuda stated in the exhibition catalogue *Im Zeichen der Teilung* that the history of the recto-verso works in Klee's oeuvre was an unwritten chapter in Klee research.⁷ These scholarly stimuli⁸ led me to the realization that the exploration of the history of the recto-verso works is one of the central desiderata of Klee research, a task that I wanted to tackle as part of a dissertation project. With the aim of capturing the phenomenon of recto-verso works in Klee's oeuvre as comprehensively as possible, I was able to identify more than 570 double-sided works, of which I could physically examine about 300 originals, in collaboration with the restorers of the Zentrum Paul Klee. In the meantime, I have been able to publish some of the research results of my studies both in specialist journals and in exhibition catalogues.⁹

Of course, Klee is not the only artist in the history of painting to have worked on both sides of a picture support. Such an approach has a long tradition in Western art. Early examples in sacred art are the Gothic winged altars, and in profane art above all the genre of the private portrait on wooden panels, where a back painting initially developed for materially determined functional reasons: Since wooden panels as picture supports are exposed to the influences of heat and cold, dryness and humidity, they were and still are also primed and/or painted on the back in order to counteract climatic fluctuations and

thus avoid a one-sided arching of the panel.

Content, attributive or allegorical references of the verso representations to the front side, as were common in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, lost their significance in the modern period. The verso often contained sketches and studies or discarded compositions that the artist considered unsuccessful, but sometimes also completed works. This applies, for example, to works of classical modernism such as those by the Brücke artists Ernst Ludwig Kirchner¹⁰ and Erich Heckel as well as the artists of the Blaue Reiter, Wassily Kandinsky and Alexej von Jawlensky. It was often simply the lack of material and financial means that led the painters to use the backs of their paintings.

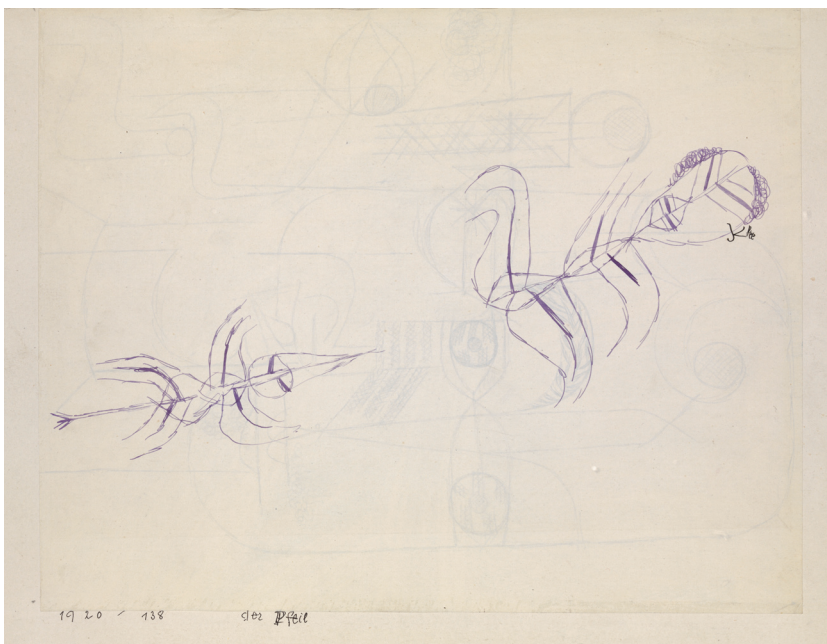
With Paul Klee, however, the numerous recto-verso works cannot be primarily traced back to frugality since most recto-verso works are on paper; moreover, the artistic results hidden on the reverse sides are by no means always to be understood as an expression of failure. Klee frequently developed the work on the front and back as an integral part of a comprehensive work process. The connections between front and back are only revealed subliminally to the eye, since Klee glued »monochrome and multicolored sheets« onto a cardboard base in each case, making it impossible to look directly at the

back of the picture support through this type of mounting. However, transparent image supports, such as thin paper, allow the back image to shimmer through. In principle, the presence of a verso image is visually recognizable on transparent media whose reverse side is not accessible, but in most cases their motifs and themes cannot be identified. The presence of the compositions on the reverse of translucent »monochrome and multicolored sheets« creates an unusual ghostly effect in the recto work since they leave shadowy traces on the front.

In contrast to the »monochrome and multicolored sheets« the representations on the reverse side of opaque picture carriers such as canvas or paperboard are generally not visible from the recto side, often only coming to light through restoration work, scientific investigations or manipulations, such as are common in the art trade. In most cases, the connections between the front and back of a picture are only revealed through a precise reconstruction of the pictorial working process and a historically rooted analysis of the meaning of the images and their relationship.

On the basis of the above explained nature of the support, the double-sided works can thus be divided into two groups: those with transparent and those with opaque supports.

Abb. 4
Paul Klee
The Arrow, 1920, 138
pen on paper on cardboard
22,4 x 28,1 cm
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
© Zentrum Paul Klee, Bildarchiv



TRANSPARENT MEDIA—THE ARROW

The literature on Klee links his 1920 drawing *The Arrow* (*Der Pfeil*, 1920, 138) (FIG. 4) to the recurring theme of an arrow as »portentous sign« or as »a symbol of eros.«¹¹ The recto work depicts a tension-laden scene of a man transforming into an arrow, a phallic symbol, and approaching a woman with wide-opened legs. The man may also be interpreted to resemble a male bird with a pointed beak. In his personal oeuvre catalogue which records and numbers work titles chronologically, Klee denoted *The Arrow* as an »erotic drawing« (erotische Zeichnung). The artist added the same personal designation to each of the five works that follow *The Arrow* in the catalogue, namely *Game (Lesbian Mode)* (*Spiel*

[.lesbische Tonart.] 1920, 139), *Dream in Two Parts* (Zwihältiger Traum, 1920, 140), *Mae-nadic Terror* (maenadischer Schreck, 1920, 141), *Exhaustion* (Erschlaffung, 1920, 142) and

Heart-Arrow-Scherzo (Herz-Pfeil-Scherzo, 1920, 143). Apparently these works form an iconographic program on eros and are directly connected with one another.¹² Two other works in this group in addition to *The Arrow* (FIG. 5) contain drawings on their reverse sides: *Dream in Two Parts* and *Exhaustion* (FIG. 6, 7, 8).¹³

All these erotic drawings were done on thin letter paper with comparatively high transparency, and the contours of their verso drawing are easy to see. The unity of the series is emphasized by their use of a closely related form vocabulary employed for the figures.

Several other pictures in Klee's oeuvre that deal with »eros« or »gender issues« correspond thematically with his erotic drawings of 1920. These rely on a wide range of inspiration. Some emerge from Klee's personal experiences¹⁴ or are tainted with a sarcastic undertone critical of bourgeois society.¹⁵ Others were based on current events, such as Klee's illustrations for *Berlin Potsdam Square or the Nights of the New Messiah* (Potsdamer Platz oder die Nächte des neuen Messias) by Curt Corrinth. The novel takes up the events of the 1918 German revolution with its liberation from the dominant political powers and gender norms of the bourgeoisie.¹⁶ Klee also took inspiration from metaphysical allegories of creation by combining them with the visual design theory he developed at the Bauhaus.¹⁷ Along with satire, eros is a fundamental tenor in his oeuvre. Naturally, there are works in which only one of these aspects is prevalent, but a fusion of them all forms the core of his artistic production. Here a poignantly critical spirit blends satire with ludicrous absurdity. This satirical humor was topical in the time of crisis around the First World War and would gradually develop into an attitude of self-irony.

With these connections in mind, let us return to examining the motif and concept of Klee's verso image in *The Arrow*. (FIG. 5) The first thing that stands out in the verso work is a male head in frontal view, occupying the right side of the picture. The face is unnaturally stretched, with wide open eyes and a thickly drawn right eyebrow. It seems as if a

Fig. 5
Paul Klee
Untitled (verso image of *The Arrow*)
pen on paper
rotated 90 degrees
contrast digitally enhanced by Myriam Weber
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Bildarchiv



Fig. 6
Paul Klee
Dream in Two Parts, 1920, 140
pen on paper on cardboard
21 x 27.3 cm,
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne / Centre de création industrielle
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv

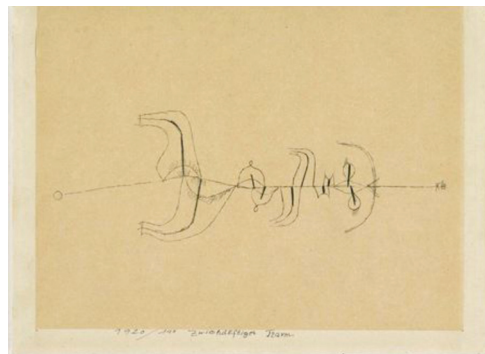


Fig. 7
Paul Klee
Exhaustion, 1920, 142
pen on paper on cardboard
22,2 x 28 cm
Ristori Galleria d'Arte, Albenga
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv



Fig. 8.
Paul Klee
Untitled (verso image of *Exhaustion*)
pencil on paper
Ristori Galleria d'Arte, Albenga
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv

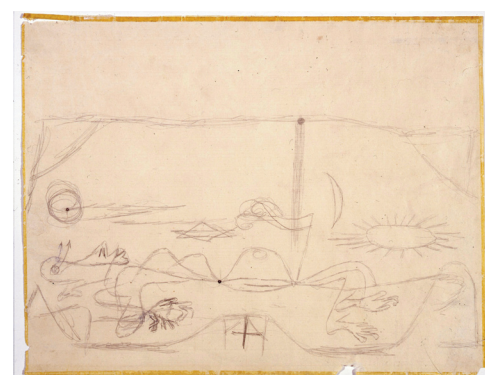


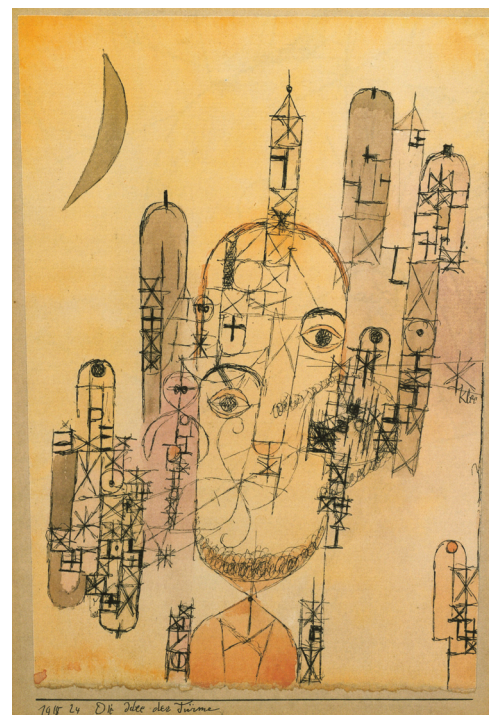
Fig. 9.
Paul Klee
The Idea of the Towers, 1918, 24
pen and watercolour on paper on
cardboard
21,7 x 15,4 cm
Private collection, Staatliche
Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie,
Museum Berggruen
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv

crescent moon and eyeball are dangling from the head's cranium which extends in an arch shape towards the upper edge of the paper. Upon close examination, two additional figures emerge that are shown in profile with bulging eyeballs, staring at the figure facing towards the front. Klee linked the outlines of several faces to form a single structure; each face is a component of a larger scaffolding which extends beyond the edge of the composition.

Another example for such a physiognomic-architectural picture is Klee's 1918 watercolor *The Idea of the Towers* (*Die Idee der Türme*, 1918, 24) (FIG. 9). In this painting, the Expressionist utopia »Spirit Cathedrals« (*Kathedralen im Geiste*) is personified by the figure in the center.¹⁸ While architectural elements dominate this picture, the elongated head with an arch-shaped cranium, the prominent eyebrows, and the wide-open eyes in *The Idea of the Towers* resemble their counterparts in the front-facing figure on the reverse side of *The Arrow*. Moreover, the moon and eyeballs are common motifs in both works. These two motifs also occur in Klee's demonic, cosmic, ruin-like landscapes created between 1915 and 1918.

Eyes, like arrows, contain multiple meanings in Klee's artwork.¹⁹ The eyes of the male face in frontal view in the verso image of *The Arrow* occupy a special position in the work. Klee drew pairs of thick lines extending from the pupils, with hatches in the space between the lines—a particular motif that is limited to a small number of works painted between 1918 and 1920. The artist often used this special motif to represent otherworldly, overwhelming presences, such as female goddesses, the Virgin Mary, angels, or masks.²⁰ The wide-open eyes suggest a sorcerous gaze full of mystery and recall the image of a Seer, who gazes inward and is far removed from the earthly realm.²¹

In his diaries Klee said of himself that he possessed such eyes, reminiscing on his friend and fellow painter Franz Marc who had perished during the war. »My earthly eye is too farsighted and sees through and beyond the most beautiful things.« Following this



self-stylization he later equated the act of artistic creation with the biblical genesis.²² Such eyes, that transcend earthly restraints and see all, ultimately connote a divine creator.

Only pictures produced before *The Arrow* take up the Expressionist idea of a face that is both physiognomic and architectural or make use of the divine eye motif. Accordingly, the verso image was most likely produced at an earlier date. *The Arrow* was part of an exhibition that toured Czechoslovakia between January and May of 1921, suggesting that the drawing was mounted onto cardboard probably not later than the end of 1920, and the verso image must have therefore been created before 1920. The verso image was not recorded in Klee's personal oeuvre catalogue nor did he dispose of it. When Klee began painting *The Arrow*, he turned over the sheet and rotated it by 90 degrees. On the front side he incorporated the eyes into a work following his artistic program on eros and, by inserting them into a new composition, detached the eyes from any monumental, lofty context. The body outline of the female figure with outstretched arms and legs of the recto overlaps with the physiognomic architectural motif on the verso (FIG. 10).

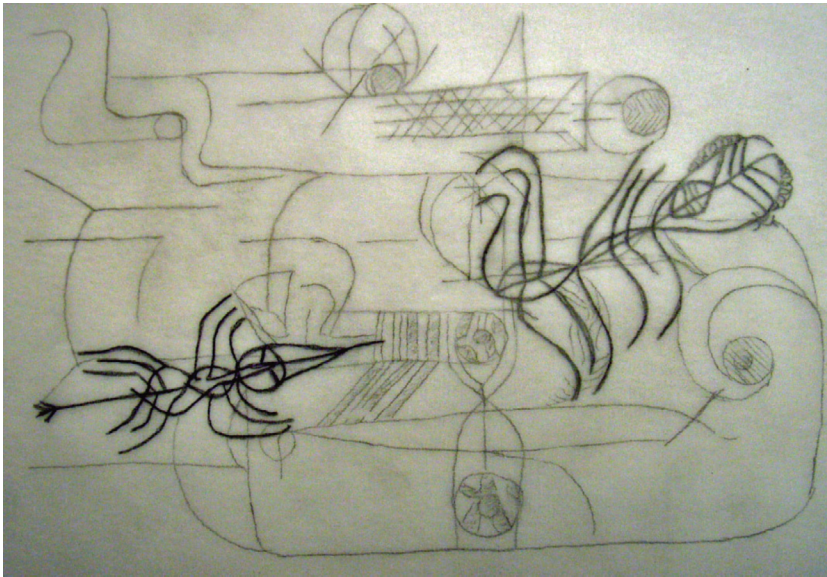


Fig. 10.
Juxtaposed tracings of recto and
verso images from *The Arrow*
©Fred Damberger

Fig. 11.
Paul Klee
The Eye of Eros, 1919, 53
pen on paper on cardboard
13,3 x 21,6 cm
Morton G. Neumann Family
Collection, Chicago
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv

Fig. 12.
Paul Klee
V. Womanhood Finally Redeemed,
1918, 187
illustration in *Berlin Potsdam
Square or the Nights of the New
Messiah*
pen on paper on cardboard
28,9 x 21,9 cm
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Bildarchiv

Her right leg traverses the eyeball of the second figure in the verso image, while her left leg follows the outline of the right eyebrow of the male face in frontal view. Her right arm links with the eyeball's outline and her left arm with that of the crescent moon. This floating female figure, attacked by incoming forces, both on the recto side and on the verso side, was not put in this location accidentally. She is integrated into the composition of the verso image which was already in place. On the other hand, the moving male arrow does not adopt coordinates related to the physiognomic architectural composition on the reverse. This emphasizes his independence in contrast to the female figure, which is bounded by the reverse composition.

Klee used the transparency of the paper to connect both images into one coherent narrative. Upon recognizing the artist's awareness of such connections in his works, the function of the eyes on the reverse become impossible to ignore. They restrict the movement of the female figure. The eyeball to which her right arm and right leg are connected, as well as the peculiarly shaped eye before her genitals and the other eyes, are like a swarm of stares that encircles her. Klee here materializes the essence of the masculine gaze. Put in musical terminology, the composition has two parts: in the first, the male figure, transformed into a phallic arrow aims towards the female figure on the front, and in the second, the female figure is ex-

posed to the gaze of the right eye belonging to the male on the backside. The collinearity of these parts—arrow, eye, sexual organs—symbolize the movement of the male towards the female figure.²³ We see here also Klee's self-irony transforming the lofty creator on the verso into a baser procreative act on the recto.

The eyes expose the lustful intention of the male arrow to penetrate the female body. Another work by Klee, *The Eye of Eros* (*Das Auge des Eros*, 1919, 53) thematizes a similar scene of voyeuristic harassment (FIG.11). As the title suggests, in this drawing a single, all-encompassing eye shoots piercing rays at the genitals and breasts of a female figure beneath it. In a testimony of male violence represented by the eye, the female's face is obliterated with thin lines that wipe out her expression.

Klee's illustrations to Curt Corrinth's *Berlin Potsdam Square or the New Messiah's Nights*, V. *Womanhood Finally Redeemed* (V. *endlich*

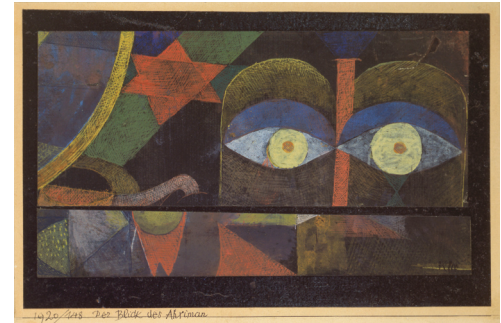


erlöstes Frauentum) of 1918 (FIG. 12), and *Lovers* (*Liebes-Paar*, 1920, 147) (FIG. 13), denoted as an »erotic watercolor in monumental style« (erotisches Aquarell monumentalen Stils) in the artist's personal oeuvre catalog, take up this connection between eyes and eros.

Fig. 13.
Paul Klee
Lovers, 1920, 147
watercolour on paper on cardboard
24,8 x 40,6 cm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, The Berggruen Klee
Collection
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv



Fig. 14
Paul Klee
The Glance of Ahriman, 1920, 148
watercolour and body colour on
paper on cardboard
12,5 x 20,5 cm
Private collection
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv



In *V. Womanhood Finally Redeemed*, the eye triggers a vision of ecstasy in the woman while in *Lovers* belts of red, orange, brown, and black color create a horizontally layered, geometric space that integrates the male and female figures. The reduction of their bodies into abstract bars of color that melt into one another and obscure the borders between them can be understood as erotic. Here, too, in the region near the hips of the male who embraces the woman from behind the artist has placed an eye.

These pictures indicate how Klee as an artist understood the symbolism of interwoven arrows and eyes. In these works, the motif of a single eye is connected to the idea of eros. The single eye has significant iconological connotations in Christianity and other religions. Eyes have occupied special roles in many traditional belief systems, such as Zoroastrianism, Greek mythology, or the ancient Egyptian faith. The sun, moon, and stars as constituents of the universe were likened to eyes that are the source for the creation of all things.²⁴ Klee's personal statement »my earthly eye is too farsighted« in itself extends beyond individual religions to symbolize the eye of the creator in primordial beliefs. In ancient religions, divine creators were also the gods of destruction, uniting two facets in one being. Klee's personal interpretation of this dualism was informed by his experiences during the war. In letters and diary entries between 1914 and 1918, he wrote that good

and bad should combat one another with equal potency and complement one another symbiotically to form a unity—a unison the painter had sought to find himself.²⁵ During the wartime years, Klee became fascinated with the Zoroastrian destruction deity Ahriman²⁶ and in 1920 he produced *The Glance of Ahriman* (*Der Blick des Ahriman*, 1920, 148) (FIG. 14).

The pairing of the arrow in *The Arrow* and the eye in the verso image reveals Klee's dialectic of a dualism between creation and destruction. Klee originally included eyes in his works to symbolize a penetrating, lofty gaze. At the same time, the composition intentionally places them in an aggressive position between the arrow and female genitals. Eyes and arrow are directly linked, illustrating the simultaneity of creation and destruction also seen in Klee's *The Wild Man* (*Der wilde Mann*, 1922, 43) (FIG. 15).



Fig. 15
Paul Klee
The Wild Man, 1922, 43
oil transfer drawing and
watercolour on primed gauze on
paper on cardboard
50,2 x 32,1/32,6 cm
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus
und Kunstbau, München,
Dauerleihgabe der
Gabriele Münter- und Johannes
Eichner-Stiftung
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv

Arrows protrude from the head and genital area and from the eyes of the wild male figure, signifying both confusion and eros. Their function as metaphors for the driving forces of creation ultimately binds arrows (procreation) and eyes (divinity) together. In this way, Klee combines these two multifaceted metaphors to release energy akin to a chemical reaction. Amidst this simultaneity of creation and destruction in *The Arrow*, an aggressive motive force informs the production process and acts as a confident accomplice to the eyes shining through from the reverse side of the image.

NON-TRANSPARENT MEDIA - RUNNER (LÄUFER)

Runner (Läufer, 1920, 25) is a very important painting with regard to Klee's career formation and his public reception at the time (FIG. 16).



Fig. 16.
Paul Klee
Runner (Hooker - Boxer), 1920, 25
watercolour on paper, 21,6 x 30,5
cm, Private collection, Frankfurt
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv

Fig. 17.
Paul Klee, Verso image of *Runner*
fragment of *Woman and Beast*,
First Version, 1903, etching
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv

Fig. 18.
Der Ararat - Zweites Sonderheft:
Paul Klee, Katalog der 60. Ausstel-
lung der Galerie, Neue Kunst Hans
Goltz, Mai-Juni 1920, München:
Goltz, 1920, p. 20

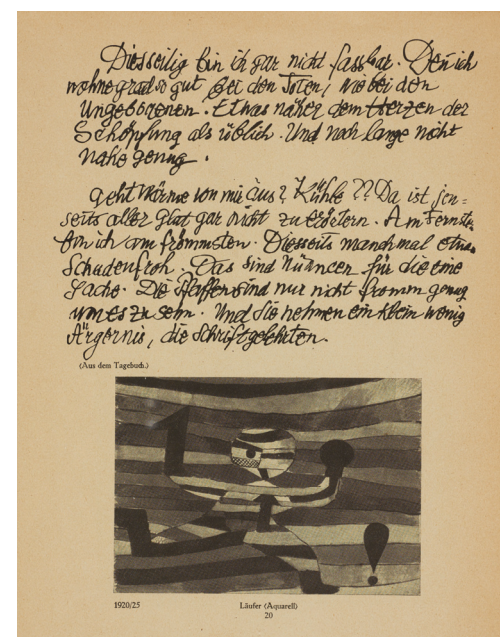
Still, its significance is only insufficiently elucidated in Klee literature.²⁷ The following section analyzes the relationship between double-sided works on non-transparent media through the example of *Runner* and its verso image, the etching *Woman and Beast (Weib und Tier, 1903)* (FIG. 17).

Klee registered early successes on the art market through various exhibitions at the Galerie Der Sturm Berlin between 1916 and 1917 while the First World War was still raging. He established his general reputation as a first-class avant-gardist by 1920.²⁸ The year



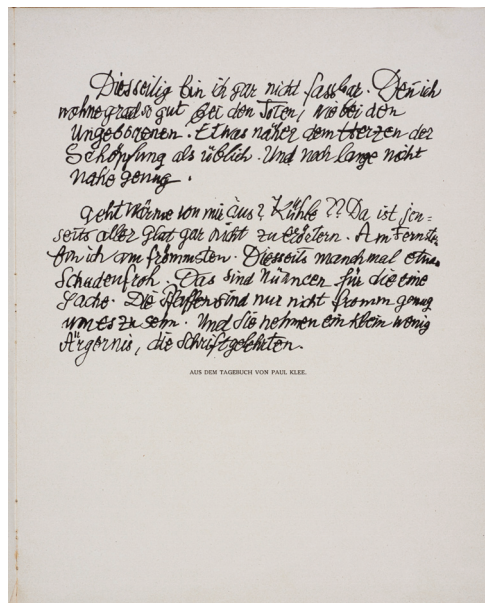
before, on 1st October 1919 Klee had signed an exclusive rights contract with the Munich-based art dealer Hans Goltz. As a result, he was able to hold solo exhibitions at the Galerie Neue Kunst Hans Goltz, and from May to June 1920, he had his largest solo show up to that date. The relatively early work number 25 of the watercolor *Runner*, suggests that Klee painted it around the beginning of 1920 and included it in this exhibition.

The second special issue of the art journal *Der Ararat*, published as an exhibition catalogue for the venue, featured a copy of a handwritten text by Klee himself: »On this side, I am not at all comprehensible, for I reside just as well with the dead, as with the unborn. A little closer than usual to the heart of creation, and still by far not close enough.«²⁹ (FIG. 18). Below this text a reproduction of *Runner* appeared. The journal indicates that



the text was »taken from [Klee's] diary« but his diaries contain no excerpt that directly resembles it. Only a single, slightly similar quote can be found.³⁰ Perhaps Klee polished this passage for the exhibition catalogue and rewrote it strategically in a self-stylized manner. The text strongly appeals to the image of an »artist who transcends the world«, and it also adorned the title page of Leopold Zahn's monograph *Paul Klee: Leben, Werk, Geist* (*Paul Klee: Leben, Werk, Geist*), which Zahn published right after the exhibition. At the end of the section on Klee's life and artistic development, Zahn emphasizes the solo exhibition at the Galerie Neue Kunst Hans Goltz as the pinnacle of Klee's career. On that page, once again, a picture of *Runner* is reproduced.³¹ (FIG. 19).

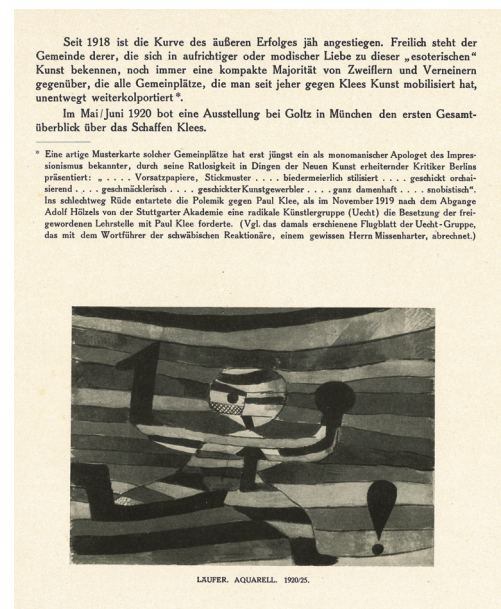
Fig. 19.
Leopold Zahn, *Paul Klee: Leben, Werk, Geist*, Potsdam: Kiepenheuer, 1920, title page and p. 15



At the time when he published his monograph on Klee, Zahn was a colleague of Goltz and chief editor of *Der Ararat*. Zahn probably chose the same image and text for the special issue of *Der Ararat* and his own book on Klee. However, it is also possible that Klee himself made the selections for both publications, because he provided autobiographical material. In any case, *Runner*, symbolic of the avant-garde art movement, became the spearhead image of Klee's rapidly increasing appeal among a general public audience. The artist transformed the *Runner's* right arm into the number »1«, and an upward pointing arrow on his chest, as well as an exclamation

point also stand out as special attributes of the painting. These symbols carry proactive meaning and infuse the work with a message of advancement towards the future. By linking *Runner* to Klee's self-stylized text, the painting functions as a symbol for the artist's career formation as a whole.

Klee had self-consciously laid the foundations for this reception process. His painting was given the title *Runner* in the publications of his exhibition catalogue and Zahn's monograph in 1920, but in his personal oeuvre catalogue Klee recorded its full title as *Runner-Hooker-Boxer* (*Läufer-Haker-Boxer*). Clearly, the figure represents not merely a runner, but a boxer performing a hook punch. The raised left hand sports a boxer's glove, rendered in black watercolor. Klee painted another six paintings with the title *Runner*. The work *Runner at the Goal* (*Läufer am Ziel*, 1921, 105) (FIG. 20) created the following year most closely resembles *Runner-Hooker-Boxer*.



The painting bears a victorious athlete with joyfully raised hands who also bears the triumphant number »1« on his forehead. Theodor Däubler, who was one of the first art critics to recognize Klee's talent, wrote on the occasion of a 1917 exhibition at the Galerie Der Sturm: »Paul Klee is, after Marc's death, the most important painter of the Expressionist tendency.«³² Spurred on by this almost prophetic critical acclaim by Däubler

Fig. 20.
Paul Klee
Runner at the Goal, 1921, 105
watercolour and pencil on paper on
cardboard
30,7 x 22,7 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York, Estate of Karl
Nierendorf, By purchase
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv



in 1917, Klee achieved success in the art world. Manifestly the raised left boxing glove and right arm in the form of a »1« are a metaphor for Klee's battle and victory for the avant-garde.

Fig. 21.
Georg Grosz
Boxer, 1920, oil on canvas, present
whereabouts unknown

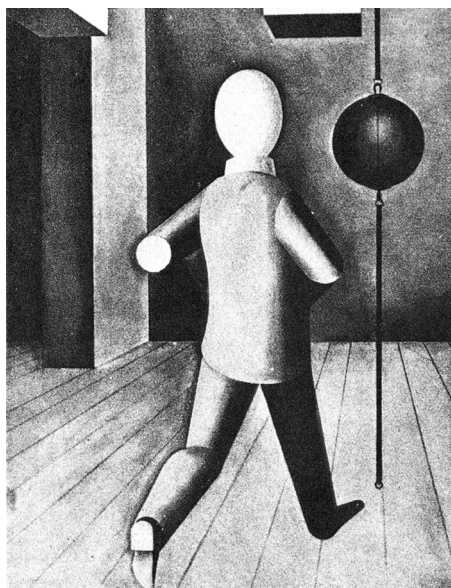
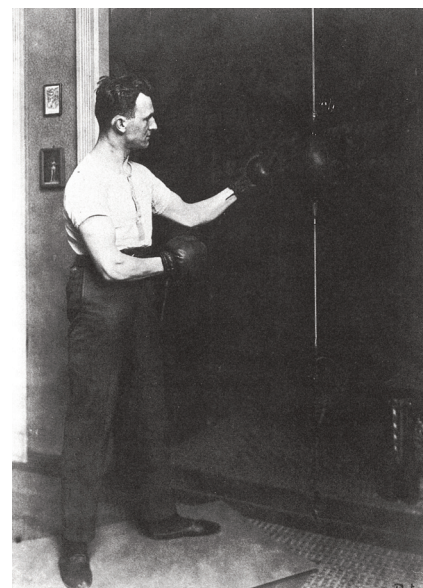


Fig. 22.
Georg Grosz
At the Punchingball, 1919/1920,
Akademie der Künste, Berlin



During the so-called »Golden Twenties«, in which German society and culture flourished, many left-wing intellectuals and artists admired boxing for its air of poverty, primal and uncivilized nature. For example, Jewish art dealer Alfred Flechtheim enjoyed practicing boxing himself. They felt spiritually connected to boxers through their shared existence as outsiders of society. George Grosz was an enthusiastic proponent of this view. In his paint-

ings Grosz rendered boxers as symbols of an existential struggle in society (**FIG. 21**) and even circulated images of himself in boxer's guise³³ (**FIG. 22**)

In his *Runner*, Klee might have also sought to compete with artists like Grosz who fashioned themselves as anti-bourgeois boxers. In April and May of 1920, just before Klee held his first solo exhibition at the Galerie Neue Kunst Hans Goltz, Grosz was also granted his first single-artist show there. Just as for Klee shortly after, *Der Ararat* published a special issue (the first) as a catalogue accompanying the exhibition by Grosz. In October and November 1920, a special exhibition »Paul Klee und George Grosz« was even dedicated to the two artists which took place in the Kunstsalon Emil Richter in Dresden. In the exhibition review, Klee was cast as a metaphysicist of abstract mysticism contrasting with the Grosz, the up and coming caricaturist depicting the sensuality and power of the human figure.³⁴ Klee and Grosz were aware of

each other's work through art criticism and the art market, particularly through the critic Däubler and the art dealer Goltz.³⁵ In addition, the formative periods for both Grosz's and Klee's careers coincided from around 1916 to 1920.³⁶ The form vocabulary of *Runner* corresponds with Klee's *Lovers* (**FIG. 13**), in its fusion of abstract and figurative elements—Klee's quest for the »monumental«—continued for many years. Perhaps in *Run-*

ner Klee concealed his pride at having exceeded his competitor Grosz's naturalistic and ironic visual language, which he had fashioned into a piercing weapon of social critique. This multilayered meaning in Klee's *Runner* is augmented by the presence of *Woman and Beast* on its reverse side.

Between June 1903 and March 1905, Klee produced a series of etchings entitled *Inventions* (*Inventionen*) and grouped them together as *Opus I*.³⁷ The final version of *Woman and Beast* (FIG. 23) was included in *Inventions*. The artist used a fragment (FIG. 17) of a print of the first version on paper (FIG. 24) for *Runner* which he painted on the opposite side. In Munich, which had abdicated its role as progressive art center to Berlin, Klee's *Inventions* formed his artistic debut at the Munich Secession exhibition in June 1906.³⁸ Klee made the first version of *Woman and Beast* in July 1903.³⁹ Dissatisfied with the result, from the fall of that year he continued to create new versions⁴⁰ until he completed the final one in November (FIG. 23).⁴¹ Klee placed this final version as number one among the *Inventions* series and eventually did not record the first version of *Woman and Beast* in his personal oeuvre catalogue. It was

Runner was the only work produced in 1920 that Klee painted onto a discarded print. A particular attachment to his first version of *Woman and Beast* might have stimulated Klee to rediscover it seventeen years later in 1920 for *Runner*.

There are four examples of the first version of *Woman and Beast* known today. Two are completed works in the Hermann und Margrit Rupf Foundation Kunstmuseum Bern (FIG. 24) and the former Collection Bürgi, respectively (FIG. 25).

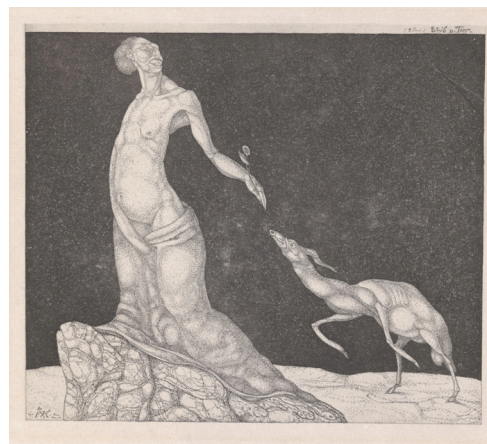
Perhaps during his exile in Switzerland starting in 1933, the artist gave a print of the first version to the friends and patrons of his final years in Bern, Hermann and Margrit Rupf, and Hanni Bürgi. It is almost as if Klee regarded the first version of *Woman and Beast* as a bonus track of the *Inventions* series. Klee wrote the designation »first version« with the pencil on the sheet of *Woman and Beast* in the Rupf Collection.

The other two prints of the first version of *Woman and Beast* were used as picture support for other works. The first of these prints served as picture support for the watercolor *Country Houses on the Beach* (*Landhäuser am Strand*, 1914, 214) (FIG. 26, 27), which was

Fig. 23.
Paul Klee
Woman and Beast, Final Version,
1904, 13
etching
17,4 x 19,9 cm
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Bildarchiv

Fig. 24.
Paul Klee
Woman and Beast, First Version,
1903
etching
21,7 x 28,2 cm
Hermann und Margrit Rupf-
Stiftung, Kunstmuseum Bern
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Bildarchiv

Fig. 25
Paul Klee
Woman and Beast, First Version,
1903
etching
Private collection
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv



common practice to reuse the reverse sides of sheets from misprints or abandoned works to make new ones. Klee painted watercolors onto the reverse sides of disposed etchings, regardless of whether they originated from himself or another artist. In total there are 62 works of Klee painted on etching paper, which were produced between 1912 and 1935. However, his oeuvre catalogue indicates that

created on the trip to Tunisia in the spring 1914.

The verso includes the dedication »to my friend Hans Bloesch«. Perhaps Klee hesi-

tated to give this first version of *Woman and Beast* to Bloesch, who valued the final version more⁴² and deposited it with his parents in Bern.⁴³ The second of these prints was cut in two, separating the woman and beast onto two fragments. Klee used the severed section with the beast as support for the work, *Growing Grass* (*Wachsendes Gras*, 1917, 41) (FIG. 28, 29, 30) integrating the material traces of the etching plate onto the composition of the recto.

»The L-shaped indentation is the platemark that appears darker because of the pooled watercolor. He incorporated foxing

Fig. 26.
Paul Klee
Country Houses on the Beach,
1914, 214
watercolour on paper on cardboard
21,9 x 28,6 cm
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Bildarchiv



Fig. 27
Paul Klee
Verso image of *Country Houses on the Beach*
Woman and Beast, First Version,
1903 etching
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Bildarchiv



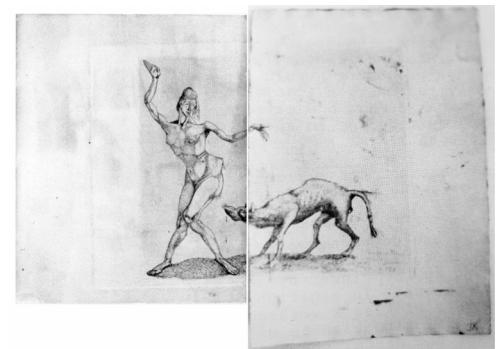
Fig. 28
Paul Klee
Growing Grass, 1917, 41
watercolour on paper on cardboard
21,5 x 30,6 cm
Private collection
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv



Fig. 29
Paul Klee
Verso image of *Growing Grass*
fragment of *Woman and Beast*,
First Version, 1903
etching
©Zentrum Paul Klee, Archiv



Fig. 30
Paul Klee
Reconstruction of versos of *Runner*
and *Growing Grass*
©OSOK



that existed in the print into the design as stoma-like marks on the blades of grass.«⁴⁴ The other severed section containing the woman was used three years later for *Runner*. This is an example of Klee's penchant for layering images, to achieve a juxtaposition of the past and present.⁴⁵

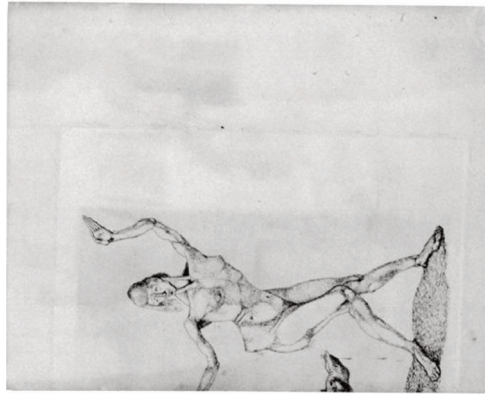
Compared with the common print that Klee gave to Rupf and Bürgi (FIG. 24, FIG. 25), the left side on the reverse of *Runner* is completely blank: the original print was cut so that only the female figure of the original composition and the beast's nose remain (FIG. 17). Print traces on the front side suggest that the blank space is located at the top of the front side, while the edge of the cut paper is at the bottom (FIG. 31).

When considering the relative position of the motifs on the two sides, and the 90 degree rotation, the arrow from *Runner* is positioned to the woman's right as if to indicate her escape route from the beast (FIG. 32).

In *Woman and Beast*, the lust of man is embodied by the beast that gazes at the woman

Fig. 31
Fig. 17 after taking the mirror image and rotating it counterclockwise 90 degrees, simulating the image of the female figure if it were viewed from the recto side

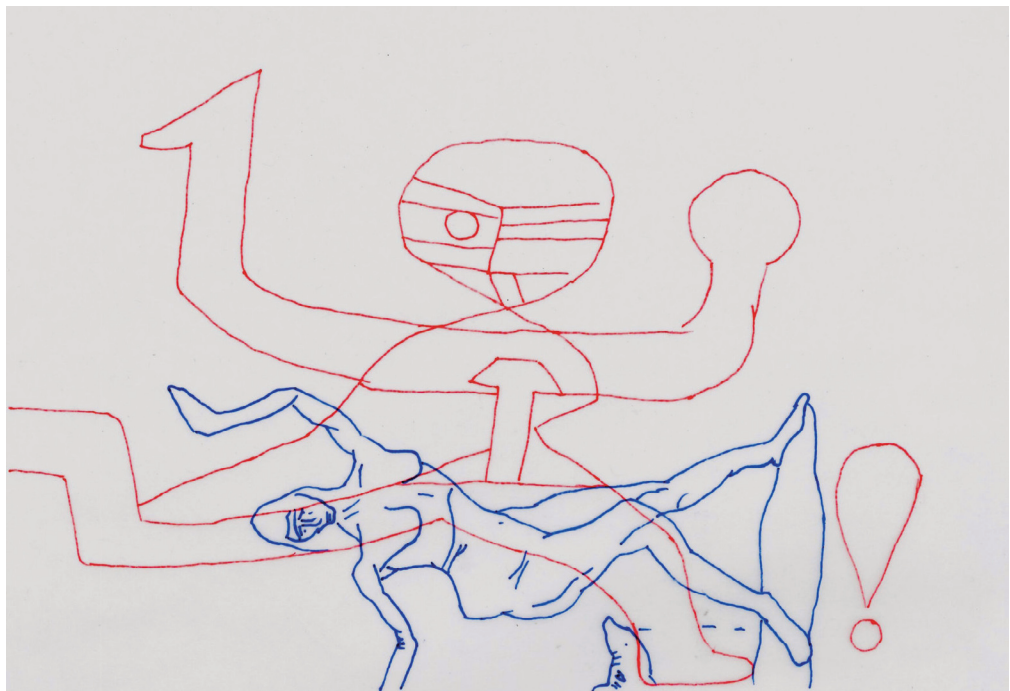
Fig. 32
Juxtaposed tracings of recto and right-left reversed verso image of *Runner* showing their relative positions.
©Fred Damberger



as if trying to sniff her scent. Such an overtly satirical treatment of human morale had become a classical theme in art starting in the nineteenth century. A letter by Klee to Lily explains his intentions with *Woman and Beast*: »The beast is the beast within man (the male).

direct critique of the hypocrisy in bourgeois society, but when Klee made *Runner* in 1920, he was tied to the bourgeois who were the customers buying his works.

Klee apparently conflated his own role as a champion of the avant-garde with the runner in his painting, joyfully running through the art market, and carried on the hands of the public. However, in the poisonous potion of satire contained in *Woman and Beast* on the reverse side with the beast cut off and only the woman left, one can read Klee's mixed feelings toward the public which he concealed in the shadow of his declaration of victory on the verso. In that respect, the picture follows Klee's statement reproduced in *Der Ararat* and Zahn's monograph: »On



It harasses a woman initially by indecently sniffing. Morale for retards: The woman who should be noble, but is brought in arousing relation with beasts, equally represents things thoroughly false and thoroughly true. Purpose: A catharsis towards humaneness.«
⁴⁶ Here, Klee interprets the vulgarity of the beast as an enemy force which he makes the direct subject of satire. The female figure in his work reflects her ambivalent existence through her body language; she is not merely disgraced, but also takes on a pose of alluring provocation. *Woman and Beast* represents a

this side, I am not at all comprehensible.« For Klee, the phrase implies more than transcending the metaphysical world. It also shows that Klee identified himself as an artist who was constantly escaping and remained uncatchable by society. This, in turn, formed the foundations of his own career. In other words, although Klee made use of the art market system, he did not draw close to the public, but covertly devised means to slip away from it. The hidden female figure on the backside of *Runner*, a proxy of this self-fashioning, clearly harbors this resolve. The

woman, enticing the hypocritical morale embodied by the public, while at the same time withdrawing from it is put in a position of being nearly violated, and alludes to the artist's own stance. Her separation from the beast ultimately emphasizes escape over violation.

This interpretation is supported by Klee's annotation to his diary entry no. 513 in his autobiographical texts (*Autobiographische Texte*), a reminiscence of July 1903 written retrospectively in 1920 for Zahn's monograph. Regarding the first version of *Woman and Beast* the artist writes: »A first version of this theme, none of whose prints survive except, perhaps, in some provincial drawer.« (see note 43). This quote suggests that early versions may not be found in Klee's Munich atelier, but in his parents' home in Bern — a bluntly false statement, since he had used a print of the first version of *Woman and Beast* as the picture support for *Country Houses on the Beach* in Tunis and the back of another for *Growing Grass* and *Runner* in Munich. This action shows Klee's twofold view towards the public and how he concealed his true intentions. At the time only Klee could know the secret that *Runner* carried with it. In a distant future, others who may uncover all circumstances of its evolution might also understand what the artist really intended.

In his 1920 solo exhibition at the Galerie Neue Kunst Hans Goltz, Klee also showed the final version of *Woman and Beast*, bringing it together with the cut-up first version concealed behind *Runner* at the same venue. Only their maker Klee was aware of this pairing. The first version of *Woman and Beast* was never exhibited throughout Klee's lifetime.⁴⁷ The work would form a crucial starting point in his painting activities since it was the ancestor to the final version of *Woman and Beast*. This etching became the first work of the series *Inventions, Opus I* in Klee's oeuvre. How fitting, then, for Klee to know that the forerunner of *Woman and Beast* supported *Runner*, the front image for his solo exhibition, from the reverse during the artist's major debut show.

Klee transferred the satirical role played by the female figure in *Woman and Beast* to

Runner. Through the ambivalent stance of *Runner* towards the public in this new context, Klee directed the satire towards the artist himself. As a result, one finds in *Runner* more subtle levels of satire than in *Inventions*. Here, the search for the existence as an artist is sublimated with the self-irony of his very being. The satire, ridicule, and irony which played an important role in the *Inventions* series, were 17 years later refreshed by their association in an important recto-verso work.

CONCLUSION

Double-sided works provide room for various hypotheses. In drawings, for example, the freely moving lines form images through associations. In turn, these lines can potentially be integrated into different relationships that construct new images. By offering the viewer a glimpse of what is otherwise concealed, the works gain a latency akin to an intuition that the viewer can absorb and interpret. Works whose total composition only came to light through changes of ownership, restoration, or research take on a second life, ignited by a meta-process. Double-sided works can be viewed front to back or back to front, and these various viewpoints give birth to an abundance of artworks. Klee embedded the discourse on the process of creation within the artwork itself. Inspecting the picture generates fundamental questions: what is an artwork and when is it completed? Klee's attitude leads us towards intuition and discovery. This is the artistic program of Klee, who was himself highly aware of both the unending nature of the creative process and the participation of others in it.

In summary, the examination of the recto-verso artworks shows that Klee regarded his works as three-dimensional objects and connected the content of their front and back sides with unusual frequency. The artist in this way strengthened the expressiveness of the work. Sometimes he hid a cipher on the back of the picture, possibly with the intention that this secret hidden in the deep layers of his work would one day come to light. The process of understanding the work of art is thus projected into an unpredictable future;

the work itself thus remains in the process of becoming. Like no other modern artist, Klee practiced the creation of recto-verso works as a multi-layered, metaphysical path of painting.

The article is dedicated to Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Kersten on his retirement from the Art Historical Institut at the University of Zurich.

¹ Wolfgang Kersten and Osamu Okuda have pioneered research on Klee's complicated work process over the past thirty years. See Kersten 1987; Kersten and Okuda 1995; Kersten, Ikeda and Miwa 2011.

² »Productiv ist eben der Weg das Wesentliche, steht das Werden über dem Sein«, in: Klee 1988, no. 928.

³ Glaesemer 1973, pp. 260-261.

⁴ Kersten and Trembley 1990, p. 87.

⁵ Okuda 2015/2016. See Zeppetella 2015/2016.

⁶ Kersten and Trembley 1990; Bäschlin, Ilg and Zeppetella 2000a; Bäschlin, Ilg and Zeppetella 2000b; Bäschlin 2003; Weber 2018.

⁷ Kersten and Okuda 1995, p. 170.

⁸ Glaesemer 1973; Kersten and Trembley 1990; Kersten 1995; Kersten 1997; Okuda 1999; Okuda 2000; Ilg 2000.

⁹ Kakinuma 2000; Kakinuma 2006 a; Kakinuma 2006 b; Kersten and Kakinuma 2011; Kakinuma 2011a; Kakinuma 2011b; Kakinuma 2011c; Kakinuma 2017.

¹⁰ See Vignau-Wilberg 1968; Gockel 1998; Herold, Lorenz and Sadowsky 2015.

¹¹ Geelhaar 1972, p. 54; Rosenthal 1979, p. 122; Kersten 1987, pp. 41, 87; Ikeda 1992, pp. 46-56, 78.

¹² On erotic meaning in *Dream in Two Parts* (*Zwihältiger Traum*, 1920, 140) and *Heart Arrow-Scherzo* (*Herz-Pfeil-Scherzo*, 1920, 143), See Kersten 1987, pp. 89-90. *Maenadic Terror* (*maenadischer Schreck*, 1920, 141) shows Dionysos and his female servants, the Maenads, from Greek mythology. In *Exhaustion* (*Erschlaffung*, 1920, 142) Dionysos and the Maenads are depicted in a state of exhaustion, resulting from an intoxicated frenzy caused by wine, music, and dance.

¹³ There is no data available on the verso image of *Dream in Two Parts*.

¹⁴ Kersten 1994, pp. 60-64; Wedekind 1993; Zöllner 2002.

¹⁵ For example, *Cunning Courtship* (*Listige Werbung*, 1913, 56) and *Temptation of a Policeman* (*Versuchung eines Polizisten*, 1913, 58) satirize the hypocritical morale of authorities, such as the gentry or police officers in the regime of emperor Wilhelm II.

¹⁶ Glaesemer 1973, pp. 254-258; Werckmeister 1989, pp. 147-156.

¹⁷ See for example *Eros* (*Eros*, 1923, 115), among other works. Kersten 1987, pp. 87-89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40; Cf. reference to Theodor Däubler's book *Mit silberner Sichel*, in: Labrusse 2016, p. 168.

¹⁹ Maedo 1978, pp. 53-68, 79.

²⁰ See for example *2 Birds and Guardian Goddess* (*2 Vögel u. Schutzgöttin*, 1918, 95), *Picture of the Madonn*, *Madonnenbild*, 1918, 206), *Mask* (*Maske*, 1919, 76), *Mask* (*Maske*, 1919, 77) or *Angelus Novus* (*Angelus novus*, 1920, 69).

²¹ Kersten 2002, p. 65.

²² Klee 1988, p. 518. The passage quoted here is based on Klee's autobiographical texts (*Autobiographische Texte*) written for the author Otto Zoff between 1919 and 1920 on the basis of diary entries from 1916 (Klee 1988, no. 1008).

²³ In his Bauhaus lectures, Klee interpreted the straight line as something active and therefore masculine. Klee 1979b, p. 78; <http://www.kleegestaltungslehre.zpk.org/ee/ZPK/BF/2012/01/01/081/>

²⁴ Glaesemer 1976, pp. 45-46.

²⁵ Klee 1988, no. 929, 1078, 1100; Letter from Paul Klee to Lily Klee, January 22, 1918, in: Klee 1979a, p. 899.

²⁶ Letter from Paul Klee to Lily Klee, February 28, 1918, in: Klee 1979a, p. 908.

²⁷ The only study that deals with the contemporary reception of *Runner* can be found in Hopfengart 1989, pp. 40-41.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-47.

²⁹ Klee 1920, p. 20.

³⁰ Klee 1988, no 430, no. 951, pp. 488, 509, 521-522; Kersten 1994, pp. 58-60.

³¹ Zahn 1920a, p. 15.

³² Däubler 1917, p. 5.

³³ Cilleßen 1994, pp. 267-270.

³⁴ Meunier 1920.

» [...] Er [Grosz] ist eine originale Kraft von mitreißendem Temperament, er könnte der kommende große deutsche Karikaturist sein. [...] Wie stark Grosz' Talent ist, zeigt besonders auch seine Graphik, die aus der einfachen Konturenzeichnung heraus eine Plastik und Eindringlichkeit der menschlichen Figur, immer in ihrer sinnlichen Idee verstanden, erwachsen läßt, die durchaus original sind. [...] Das direkte Gegenteil von Grosz ist Paul Klee; kein Maler des Untermenschlichen und der sinnlichen Idee, sondern ein Metaphysiker, ein Sänger, der höher und höher über dieses Leben

aufstrebt. [...] Eine unaussprechbare Metaphysik ringt hier um Anerkennung, eine abstrakte Mystik drängt sich und auf. Es gibt nirgendwo einen festen Halt mehr; es sind da nur Treppen, die immer höher führen, immer mehr Treppen und immer höher, in ein Unerfaßbares hinein; [...] «

³⁵ Zahn 1920b; Zahn 1920c; Werckmeister 1981, pp. 49, 56-57, 64; Jentsch, pp. 535-557; Cf. postcard sent 29 September 1955 by Grosz to Sahl with a print of the watercolor *House Interior (Haus-Inneres, 1919, 199)* by Klee, included Grosz' mocking comment »Handgestrickter Bettvorleger von Frau Pauline Klee. Original im Museum für alte Spitzen and Modern Art N.Y.«, in: Grosz and Sahl 1993, pp. 78-79.

³⁶ Jentsch, pp. 537-539.

³⁷ The designation *Opus I* is fitting since the work marks Klee's first public appearance as an artist. See Wedekind 1996, pp. 46, 50-53.

³⁸ On Klee's unsuccessful artistic career with *Inventions* in Berlin and his success in Munich 1905-1906, see Kakinuma 2019, pp. 171-173.

³⁹ Klee 1988, no. 513, pp. 490, 522, 523; Letter from Paul Klee to Lily Klee, July 12, 1903, in: Klee 1979 a, p. 335. On the circumstances of the production of the *Inventions* series, see Wedekind 1996, pp. 53-63.

⁴⁰ Klee 1988, pp. 490, 523; Letter from Paul Klee to Lily Klee, November 11 and 18, 1903, in: Klee 1979 a, pp. 361, 364-365.

⁴¹ Klee 1988, no. 580, p. 525; Letter from Paul Klee to Lily Klee, December 1, 1904, in: Klee 1979 a, p. 459.

⁴² Letter from Paul Klee to Lily Klee, May 21, 1904, in: 1979a, pp. 422-423.

⁴³ »A first version of this theme, none of whose prints survive except, perhaps, in some provincial drawer.«, in: Klee 1988, p. 523.

⁴⁴ Schulte, Ellis and King, 1986, pp. 11-12.

»The watercolor entitled *Wachsendes Glas* (Growing Grass) was removed from its secondary support to which it was entirely adhered in order to isolate it from and treat its secondary support. Klee often used the reverses of older works of art for his drawings especially during WWI when he was in military service. In this particular work dated 1917, he painted on one half of the reverse on an earlier intaglio print. The L-shaped indentation is the platemark that appears darker because of the pooled watercolor. He incorporated foxing that existed in the print into the design as stoma-like marks on the blades of grass. Once removed from its secondary support, the etching

done by Klee in 1903, entitled *Weib and Tier I* (Woman and Animal I) was revealed on the reverse. Upon treatment completion, the watercolor was interleaved and hinged to the secondary support around its edges. Its appearance was virtually identical to the work prior to treatment.«

⁴⁵ Okuda, Kakinuma and Ishikawa 2015, pp. 258-260.

⁴⁶ Letter from Paul Klee to Lily Klee, July 12, 1903, in: Klee 1979a, p. 335.

⁴⁷ See Paul-Klee-Stiftung 1998, p. 182, no. 166. The Catalogue Raisonné inaccurately records that a print of this version was included in Klee's 1920 solo exhibition. Instead, the reverse glass painting, *Girl, stooping, followed by a snake-like Dachshund (Mädchen, sich bückend, von einem schlangenartigen Dackel gefolgt; 1906.22)*, which takes up the subject of »Woman and Beast«, was shown. See Klee 1920, p. 24.

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